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December, 1900, arrangements were completed for selling the former paper to a pro-Boer syndicate—an event which made impossible the continuance as editor of one who had been chiefly distinguished for his firm, though moderate, advocacy of Liberal Imperialism. Thereafter, for several years, Cook was a leader-writer on *The Daily Chronicle*, a mere subordinate. One can only wonder at the fate which condemned a man of so much ability, influence, and judgment to a relatively obscure position. Apart from journalism, Cook's literary labors—especially his monumental edition of Ruskin—entitle him to a high place.

The story is chiefly that of an independent conscience and intellect at work among the conditions of actual politics. Accepting the practical necessity and value of moderate partisanship, Cook stressed always the superior value of independent support. His letter to Mr. Arnold Morley, one of the proprietors of *The Daily News*, who had urged him to cater to the views of extreme Non-Conformists, is a masterly lesson in sound journalism. Several times he made extreme personal sacrifices in the cause of principle. The testimony of all who knew him declares the soundness and independence of his judgment. Never tolerating dulness in a newspaper for which he was responsible, he consistently resisted the drift toward sensationalism. By nature quite as much a statesman as a journalist, he was at one time almost an unofficial Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Mills has given us some choice anecdotes and character sketches in connection with his central narrative; Cook's own diary being replete with very expressive thumb-nail sketches of his contemporaries. The story is particularly full in its references to W. E. Gladstone, to Lord Randolph Churchill, and to Ruskin. Concerning the last of these there is an anecdote that deserves to be preserved in amber. This is Ruskin's plaint about the modern circus. "The first thing I did at Folkestone," he said, "was to go to Sanger's Circus, but there wasn't half enough clown. And the elephants were shown off too much: the real charm in an elephant is to watch his native sagacity. And the chariot race was terrible—the vulgarization of the noblest thing, I suppose, in Greece." Perhaps nothing more characteristic has ever been told.

But while the narrative is rewarding in its slight divergences from the straight path of biography, one wishes that the author had given more of Cook's setting and had treated more fully the political history of the time. It is one's impression that the book might with advantage have been amplified by about one-third.

GEORGE WASHINGTON. By William Roscoe Thayer. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

The peculiar value of Mr. Thayer's biography of Washington arises principally from one cause—that Mr. Thayer has correctly estimated the difficulty

of his task as that of portraying a character more or less inscrutable in its strength, its calm, and its poise. Undoubtedly it is character rather than intellectual genius with which one has to do in studying Washington. Yet this fact does not simplify the problems; for the boundaries separating "mind" from "character" are so intangible and theoretic that no sharp distinction can be made. The fact remains that the Washington who wrote the farewell address and who swore at Lee at Monmouth, who animated his fainting soldiers to endurance at Valley Forge and at the same time criticized Congress in terms which in another man might be called cynical, was always and everywhere a manifestation of character. It is the great merit of this biography that the reader is continually brought, as it were, into the presence of this great personality.

As a political narrative, Mr. Thayer's book lacks much of completeness. As an account of military operations and of diplomatic negotiations it is designedly thin. Even in the depiction of Washington's contemporaries, Mr. Thayer, masterly portrait artist as he is, does not notably excel others who have treated of the same period. All is carefully subordinated to the great figure of Washington; all brilliancies are studiously toned down to suit the sober grandeur of the central theme. But the portrait of Washington is a portrait indeed! It is a picture, not photographic but interpretative, a picture lacking the artificial smile of the later paintings or the studied majesty of the equestrian pose. Unquestionably Mr. Thayer, without resorting to the soulless methods of mere historical dissection, has in large measure counteracted the evil influence of the Reverend Mason L. Weems, and has revealed not merely to the reason but also to the imagination of his readers the true Washington as known to his contemporaries. The inexplicable part of the great man's character, the quality that made even casual acquaintances feel as if they were in the presence of a superior being, is all the more impressive when the myths have been made to vanish. Mr. Thayer has presented his readers with that rare thing, an ideal set forth without the sentimentality of hero worship or the exaggerations of rhetoric.

THE ALTAR STEPS. By Compton Mackenzie. New York: George Doran Company.

Mr. Mackenzie's new novel is so much the most interesting study of certain aspects of religious experience that has been written either in fiction or otherwise within recent years, that one hesitates to lay stress upon its somewhat obvious shortcomings as a story. The narrative is, in the first place, merely a sort of prologue—"the prelude to *The Parson's Progress*", says the dedication; and it appears to suffer from the lack of force incidental to incompleteness. The novel, again, is constructed upon the Victorian plan, beginning with origins and proceeding deliberately, and without much drama until the problems of middle life arise and have to be met. The disposition of